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Methamphetamine Production laws need an update

EDITORIAL

Compared to heroin or cocaine, the process for creating methamphetamine is a snap. Methamphetamine can be brewed in a bathroom or kitchen, much like Prohibition-era beer. Unlike heroin or cocaine, which must be grown overseas and smuggled into the United States, this increasingly popular drug can be made anywhere, and from common chemicals. Key ingredients include anhydrous ammonia, a fertilizer that is common throughout the country and certain cold pills.

Methamphetamine has become popular in urban nightclubs and rural areas alike. Its soaring demand and ease of manufacturing have had an unfortunate, yet predictable, result: Clandestine production facilities are popping up throughout rural America, including many areas in New York. During the decade between 1989 and 1999, four methamphetamine production laboratories were found in New York state. In 2003 alone, 73 labs were uncovered by New York law enforcement officials, including one in Groton. Nationwide, about 7,000 methamphetamine labs were raided in 2003.

In addition to the illegal drugs they produce, such drug laboratories generate toxic waste products, which their operators often dump into the environment, according to **Congressman Sherwood Boehlert**, R-New Hartford. Last year, Gov. George Pataki signed legislation to explore the impact of putting additives into anhydrous ammonia. Such additives would render that fertilizer useless for drug production.

Many states have enacted tougher laws that give district attorneys and police additional tools to nab methamphetamine producers. For example, some areas impose longer sentences for those convicted of such illegal drug production. Other laws make it illegal to possess certain drug-production ingredients. New York's laws still lag behind such states. As a result, methamphetamine producers are leaving states with tougher laws and are relocating here, in New York, according to the State Commission on Investigation.

State Senator Mike Nozzolio, R-Seneca Falls, has written several bills that would provide police and prosecutors with more legal devices to stem the rising methamphetamine tide. Other state legislators need to join with Nozzolio in a larger effort to bring New York's laws on methamphetamine production up to date.

Meth labs are one type of business that New York does not need to attract.